CRITIC'S CHOICE FILE LOOKS AT THE

X-MEN

AN IN-DEPTH SURVEY OF THE X-MEN COMICS COVERING THE JOHN BYRNE YEARS ON THE BOOK, BEGINNING WITH X-MEN 111 TO 128.

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EDITED BY HAL SCHUSTER

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DEDICATED TO MUTANT LOVE

CONTENTS

An in-depth survey of the X-Men comics beginning with *X-MEN 113 to 128.*

..... 10

John Byrne and the X-Men

..... 46

X-Men #111 (June '78)
"Mindgames!"
Writer:Chris Claremont
Penciler. John Byrne
Inker. Terry Austin
Colorist. Mary Titus
Editor. Archie Goodwin

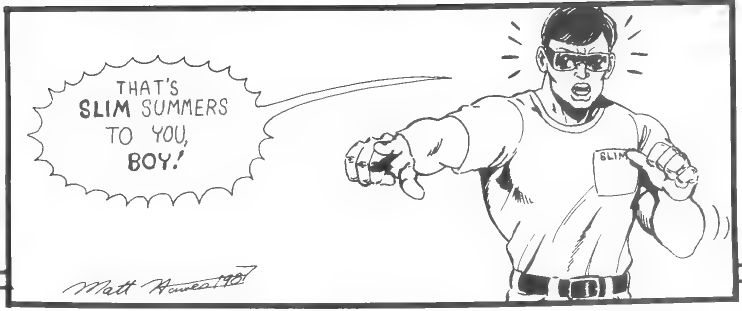
The Beast is at the circus. the end result of a search which began when Lorna Dane (Polaris) phoned him from Scotland because Havoc had been kidnapped and she could get no response when she phoned Xavier's school. The Beast, once a part of the old X-Men. had been a member of The Avengers for quite awhile, only occasionally keeping in touch with his old friends. When he arrived at the mansion, it appeared to have been deserted for a couple of weeks. The newspapers and the mail were piled up. The only clue to the whereabouts of anyone was a postcard from Xavier and Lilandra (but The Beast has no idea who she is). Cerebro had been shut down, but he had no trouble starting it up and using it to locate the X-Men. They were at the circus.

Disguised with a hat and topcoat, The Beast sees Sean Cassidy acting like a sideshow barker announcing that the circus has goddesses, demons, a man-beast from the Yukon and a man of steel! He sees one of the goddesses and it's Storm! He sees someone who looks like Jean Grey but she's an aerialist. But when she seems to miss her partner and falls, she floats gently to earth. Tracking her to her wagon, he tries talking to her, but she seems like a different person. When her friend, Slim, turns up, he sees that it's Scott. When Scott tries to throw him out of the wagon. a fight ensues which everyone in the circus seems to want to be a part of. When Colossus knocks him senseless, it's the work of minutes for a few men armed with clubs to overpower him. But this all happens right in front of Wolverine, who seems very disturbed by all this.

The Beast is taken to the wagon of "The Boss" and there sees that the man behind all this is Mesmero (first seen in **X-Men** 49 and last seen in issue 60). Mesmero can take over someone's mind just by looking into their eyes, and now it's The Beast's turn.

Wolverine is struggling, both against his shackles and the mental domination he is under. When he shatters his chains he comes back to himself, but he doesn't know where he is, or exactly why. He finds his way to Jean's wagon, knocks out Scott and starts slapping Jean until her Phoenix self emerges and destroys the mental domination over her. They then go to free the other X-Men and a riot ensues.

Someone bursts into the wagon where The Beast is held captive and distracts Mesmero enough so that The Beast breaks free.



Just as The Beast is about to attack Mesmero, something else attacks The Beast and knocks him out. Mesmero sees who has done this and is shocked.

When The X-Men burst into the wagon they find Mesmero standing over the unconscious Beast. But suddenly Mesmero collapses and they see someone sitting behind him who stands to announce himself. It is Magneto, and he is there to finish what he started in Scotland just a few weeks before (see **X-Men** #104).

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A fascinating story in which we wonder whether this elaborate plan was really all Mesmero's or whether Magneto was using Mesmero to toy with the X-Men. When Magneto was returned to his mature form in issue #104, the X-Men were forced to flee when Cyclops realized that what was happening there was just a diversion for an attempt on Xavier's life in New York. Magneto wasn't happy to see them slip away even though it meant that he had won. He wanted to defeat them far more decisively than that.

The circus identities of the X-Men are quite interesting and in the case of Cyclops capitalize on his old name. In **X-Men** #1 he was introduced as "Slim" Summers. In this issue his circus character has the name Slim embroidered on his shirt.

The action in this story is balanced against the drama of the X-Men living under mentally altered identities and fighting against one of their own—The Beast. It's interesting to see The Beast and Nightcrawler together because they look so much alike, right down to the pointed ears, or at least they did until recent events in X-Factor made the Beast look human again.

The twist at the end of this story is very effective as it seems as though the X-Men have just gotten out of a bad fix when we find that all they've done is walk right into an even worse one. Magneto's potential was never realized so well as under Claremont, as the next couple of issues ably demonstrate.

X-Men #112 (August '78)
"Magneto Triumphant!"
Writer: Claremont
Artist: Byrne
Inker: Austin
Colorist: M. Titus
Editor: Jim Shooter

Magneto has the X-Men right where he wants them. They are all together in a circus wagon where they came to confront Mesmero, only to find that Magneto had already defeated him.

Magneto makes it clear that he is there to finish what he started weeks before (in issue #104). Cyclops orders everyone out and has Nightcrawler pop outside to scout on ahead. They hear a scream and Colossus rips open the door to find Nightcrawler hanging on the wagon's step—and the wagon is ten miles above the earth. While they were talking, Magneto used his mastery of magnetism to move the wagon without anyone feeling the acceleration. The wagon is now racing through the atmosphere in a magnetic bubble towards a destination known only by Magneto.

The villain pauses to explain how he too had arrived at Xavier's mansion to find it deserted and then hid when The Beast arrived in The Avengers quinjet. He waited and followed the Beast who found the X-Men for him and then put Mesmero aside when the time was ripe. On the way, Magneto uses his powers to lower Mesmero to the ground somewhere in the Amazon jungle.

When the wagon arrives in Antarctica, Magneto has it pass into a volcano where the force bubble around it protects them as it passes through the lava to Magneto's hidden underground base below. Upon arriving, the villain shatters the wagon into hundreds of pieces.

One by one the X-Men take on Magneto and one by one he defeats them. Only Phoenix gives him a tough time but finally even she fails as her power seems to reach its limit. Because he wants them alive, Magneto doesn't kill them when he has the mutants at his mercy. Even Wolverine is spared although Magneto demonstrates how easily he can turn the X-Man's own admantium claws against him.

The X-Men awaken from the battle induced unconsciousness to find themselves bound into machines which restrict their physical movements and dampen their neural outputs so that they are unable to speak. To all intents and purposes they are as helpless as a six month old child. This is Magneto's revenge, to trap the X-Men in a

manner similar to what he underwent when he had been transformed into a small child.

"An eye for an eye, X-Men," Magneto intones. "You will not die, but you will soon wish you had. You will suffer as I suffered—to be aware of who and what you are—to each possess your powers in their fullest measure, yet be as unable to use them as a six-month old child. To be...helpless. If there is a Hell, X-Men, surely it cannot be more terrible than this."

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This issue shows why the Claremont/Byrne team on X-Men is still considered by many to be the best the series has experienced. The story and art mesh flawlessly as Byrne's linework captures fully the power and imagination of the Claremont script. This is the epitome of what a Marvel comic is in the mind of the fan. It is both vividly realized and powerfully presented, with nary a misstep in the story. Even the inevitable fight scenes are interesting as we see each X-Men come up against Magneto and learn just how powerful this premier villain of the series is. Magneto was to The X-Men what Dr. Doom is to the Fantastic Four. He encapsulated everything that the group existed to fight and no one else even ran a close second. Reading this story, we can well understand why the original X-Men (they are now known as X-Factor) would mistrust Magneto at the head of Xavier's school.

To face him was to face danger incarnate; Magneto reforming is a rabbit trick that is just impossible for his oldest adversaries to accept.

X-Men #113 (Sept. '78)
"Showdown!"
Raconteurs: Claremont & Byrne
Embellisher: Austin
Colorist: G. Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

Magneto is ravaging the Royal Australian Aerospace Research Facility at Woomera. What he steals, no man may know.

On the island of Kirinos, off Greece, Xavier is disturbed by the fact that he has lost his mental link with the X-Men. He fears for them.

In Antarctica, the X-Men are imprisoned and being serviced by a robot named Nanny who feeds them. But while the X-Men's physical coordination has been reduced to that of a six month old child, Ororo had the agility of a young girl at that age. Also, there is the little fact that her head-piece contains lock-picks, a skill she has had since childhood. Getting one in her mouth, she almost beats the complicated lock but drops the pick on the floor. Nanny returns and replaces the head-piece on Ororo's head and the frustration Ororo feels brings her to tears.

A thousand miles out in space, Magneto is aboard his orbiting base hidden on an asteroid. Since being returned to his adult form, his powers are stronger than ever and he has been able to repair the base which had been destroyed years before (in **X-Men** #5). While there he detects a minor systems malfunction at his Antarctic base and returns to make sure that the X-Men aren't free, although he believes that an unlikely possibility due to the alarm systems he has there

Upon arriving at the underground complex, he finds Nanny malfunctioning and rolling full speed in a circle. Upon landing next to her, he is attacked simultaneously by Banshee, Cyclops and Phoenix and it was almost more than he could handle.

Jean has all of the X-Men telepathically linked to Scott so that he can direct them as a team. Magneto was able to beat them before because they did not act concertedly, but took him on one-on-one.

Magneto is being beaten, and badly, particularly when Nightcrawler gets his helmet away from him and Colossus is able to pommel the villain so that he's not able to concentrate and use his power against his attacker. Even Wolverine has gotten in close and wounded the master of magnetism. Magneto is down and almost out when it becomes obvious that Phoenix's attack damaged the main control console which kept the lava dome overhead at bay. Everything is coming apart as the lava starts leaking in huge hot splashes. Magneto is able to use his powers to escape barely in time, but he is so injured that it will be months before he can put his plans back into operation.

The X-Men are separated and Phoenix and The Beast barely make it to the surface—to find themselves alone in a blizzard with no chance of rescue

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The ultimate X-Men vs. Magneto conflict. With Wolverine's claws there is the added element of a truly violent personal attack as Logan carves up Magneto's back. Magneto is seriously injured in this battle and barely escapes with his life. The element which continues to surprise him is Phoenix, whom he had thought was just the old Marvel Girl. But it is Storm who rescues the team. This story points up her non-mutant skills, the sort she must use after she loses her powers many issues down the line.

This issue, again, is a classic Marvel comic for the reasons given for #112. The battles in here clearly owe a great deal to what Jack Kirby pioneered in the Sixties, and Byrne has learned well from Jack's lead. But Byrne also has some powerful flourishes of his own.

The story moves fast, is well told and is a perfect example of why comics are often compared to films—when comics are doing what they do best., the scenes flow effortlessly from panel to panel so that they achieve the illusion of motion. Real tension is achieved when Ororo is trying to get the head-piece off to secure one of the lock-picks (which after one false start she's able to use to set everyone free).

Again, reading about the modern version of Magneto, even the one seen in the X-Men graphic novel, we forget just how deadly a character he was. Rereading this issue puts us in touch with that once more and it's a wonder that anyone would trust Magneto within a dozen yards of them.

Another classic tale.

X-Men #114 (Oct. '78)
"Desolation"
co-plotters: Claremont & Byrne
Writer: Claremont
Penciler: Byrne
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

The Beast and Phoenix are lost in the wind-blown wastes of Antarctica. Phoenix has passed out and is being carried by Hank McCoy, who is at the end of his strength as well. Suddenly Hank sees the lights of a rescue helicopter, but how to attract its attention? Hank tries to wake up Jean to see if she can create a flash to attract the copter's attention. Instead she awakens remembering that she had been trapped below ground needing to rescue Scott, and in her delirium, she creates as much fireworks as the Fourth of July! Hank tries to calm her down, tries to get through to her, to explain that only they escaped, and that the X-Men must be dead. But while Hank and Jean are rescued from the blizzard by the Navy helicopter, Colossus and the rest of the X-Men are bursting through solid rock to the open air. They've escaped, but to where?

It's Cyclops, the only one of them who has ever been there before, who explains that they're in a part of Antarctica he thought he'd never see again—The Savage Land. High overhead fly the winged dinosaurs of another era.

Free at last, the claustrophobic Storm and Banshee both take to the sky to celebrate their escape. But Banshee isn't thinking about any sort of attack until a pterasaur suddenly swoops down and grips him so tightly that he can't emit a sonic scream. After all that's happened, Storm is to weak to create any sort of violent weather to aid him.

Colossus and Wolverine understand the situation immediately and respond by having Colossus hurl Wolverine through the air where he collides with the winged dinosaur and attacks it, causing the beast to weaken its hold and release Banshee. But Wolverine hangs on and rides the creature down to the ground, ravaging it with his claws all the way down.

The risk pays off and all turns out well, but the flurry of activity has attracted the attention of someone who is hiding in the foliage—someone who recognizes Cyclops. He can also sense the X-Men's power, and is pleased.

A week later in Westchester, New York, Hank McCoy and Jean Grey arrive home. It is Jean who delivers the news to Charles Xavier that she believes the rest of the X-Men to be dead.

In the Savage Land, the X-Men are recovering from their ordeal in Magneto's base. While Scott is thinking back over the battle, wondering if there was any way he could have saved Hank and Jean, he begins shaving in a small stream. The reflection of himself with a moustache reminds him of Corsair and suddenly forgotten memories return and he begins to realize that Corsair had called him by name in spoken English!

Others think about other recent events, including Wolverine who has a picture of Jean and is mourning her loss.

While Ororo is swimming, someone sneaks up and begins sapping energy from her, but she is more powerful than he imagined and the result gives him not only sustenance but brings on a change as well. When The X-Men arrive on the scene, they are confronted by Carl Lykos, who is now in his inhuman form of Sauron!

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The Savage Land has been a place of beauty and danger ever since it was introduced by Lee & Kirby way back in **X-Men** #10. But while Ka-Zar has gotten a lot of legwork in the Marvel Universe, the Savage Land has not been invaded by too many of the Marvel galaxy of stars, and certainly not very often. Even the X-Men had only visited the place in issues 10, 60, 61 and then the saga which begins in issue 114. It certainly wasn't overused and when it has been used, it's because the writer came up with a story well worth its presentation. Obviously inspired by Edgar Rice Burroughs' Pellucidar novels, the Savage Land is an almost-anything-can-happen realm since dinosaurs still walk the earth and span the skies. The story doesn't waste any time in taking advantage of that. Right after a beautiful landscape shot on page seven which perfectly captures the wonder of this realm, Banshee is grasped by a pterasaur and Wolverine carves it up into Gainesburgers.

Tying this story into what happened to Carl Lykos (back when Roy Thomas was doing some of the finest issues of the old X-Men) is a perfect choice as it helps answer questions about Sauron's origin, plus Sauron obviously belongs in the Savage Land. He's a fascinating and tragic Jekyll/Hyde character not unlike Spider-Man's nemesis the Lizard.

Once again the action is balanced by moments of quiet introspection as The X-Men deal with their grief over the apparent deaths of Hank McCoy and Jean Grey while thousands of miles away Xavier and Jean Grey try to deal with the deaths of the X-Men.

The counterpoint is a very interesting idea, although as a subplot it drags on just a couple issues too long.

X-MEN #115 (Nov. '78)
"Visions Of Death!"
Author/Co-Plotter: Claremont
Co-Plotter/Penciler: Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: Francoise Mouly
Editor: Roger Stern

Sauron has captured Storm in the process of draining energy from her, but the rest of the X-Men are on the scene. Wolverine impetuously rushes in to attack and Sauron grabs the X-Man in its talons and flies upward, hitting Wolverine with a blast of super hypnosis. It makes Logan think that the other X-Men are actually inhuman monsters and then it releases him, to do Sauron's fighting for it.

Cyclops knocks Wolverine out with an optic blast and then they turn their attention back to the were-pterasaur.

Banshee flies in and knocks Sauron to the ground with a sonic scream.

When Nightcrawler goes to check on Wolverine, he is attacked by him and when Wolverine looks up, he doesn't see Cyclops blasting Sauron but a monster attacking Phoenix. Wolverine tackles Cyclops and Scott has no choice but to turn his optic blasts on Logan again and knock him dozens of yards into some trees. Cyclops turns to see Sauron swooping down on him but then Banshee hits the creature from above and Cyclops hits from below, catching him in a crossfire. Sauron flees in search of more energy as it has been drained by this relentless attack

It comes upon Colossus, who is carrying Storm to safety. Just as it grabs Colossus from behind, Cyclops calls out to him to change to his armored form. The sudden discharge of energy knocks Sauron for a loop and he falls to the ground.

By the time Wolverine reaches him (having finally regained his senses), Sauron has changed back to his normal human form of Karl Lykos. Wolverine still wants to exact revenge but is stopped by the appearance of Ka-Zar and his sabertooth, Za-Bu.

Wolverine is unimpressed and after what he's been through is more than willing to take on both of the newcomers, but then Cyclops runs up and explains who they all are to Ka-Zar .

Later they all gather in a village council house to discuss what has happened. There Karl Lykos explains how he found his way into the Savage Land after their last encounter (**X-Men** #61). There he chose to try to make peace with himself, recognizing that he had been mad before and possessed by Sauron. In the Savage Land, Lykos witnessed a man named Kirk Marston consumed by enchanted flames and transformed into the Petrified Man. There the priestess Zaladane offers to serve him. He watches as the Petrified Man destroys a strange, alien city in the midst of the land and then uses slave labor to construct a great metropolis in the central lake. Ka-Zar, Lykos and others attempted to stop the Petrified Man, but without success.

Ka-Zar asks the help of the X-Men against this menace but Cyclops refuses because he fears that if Magneto escaped he might be going after Prof. X.

The X-Men leave to find the cavern exit to the outer world

when suddenly the weather changes and a savage snowstorm sets in—the first ever to plague the Savage Land. Somehow The Petrified Man's city has upset the ecological balance of the area and it could spell disaster for the Savage Land.

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This drastic weather change apparently also changes the mind of Cyclops about helping Ka-Zar as in #116 the X-Men are sneaking up on the Petrified Man's city and no more mention is made of Scott's insistence that they escape to contact Prof. X.

This story has a lot going on as it attempts to tie up loose plot ends left in the cancelled Ka-Zar comic, although those loose ends, while tied up, are never really explained to those of us who never read the Ka-Zar comic.

Also, while I remember **X-Men** #60 & 61 very well and knew who Sauron was, all new readers get by way of explanation is how this story dovetails with the climax of issue #61. The origin of Sauron is never explained, only how he got to the Savage Land.

The battle with Sauron is interesting because while most superhero slugfests start out with the good guys losing and slowly getting the upper hand, this fight is pretty much even all the way through. While Wolverine is successfully pitted against the X-Men, Cyclops and Banshee knock the stuffings out of Sauron in every encounter and finally he's laid low by the change of Colossus from human to armored form. By this it seems apparent that other than for his mind control power, Sauron is just no match for the X-Men,

The double-page spread on pages 2 & 3 really captures the fury of the battle and the strangeness of Sauron as he's in his humanoid/pterasaur form while still wearing his gunbelt and breeches.

Claremont has to balance a lot of characters in this story as it covers the X-Men, Ka-Zar, Sauron/Karl Lykos and the Petrified Man and friends. And yet everything is coherent, except perhaps for some of the explanation for some of the carryovers from the Ka-Zar comic.

This is a classic comic and one of the must-have issues of the Byrne/Claremont X-Men.

X-MEN #116
"To Save The Savage Land"
Author: Chris Claremont
Artist: John Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

The X-Men and Ka-Zar hike through the now frozen Savage Land to the huge city built by the Petrified Man. It's a technological wonder which is built over the volcanic shaft which keeps the area tropical, thus interfering with the ecological balance and causing winter to descend on the region for the first time. But before they can mount a plan of attack, they are seen by the Petrified Man's mounted guards and attacked. Cyclops, Colossus, Banshee and Ka-Zar are captured by the talons of the pterasaurs and quickly flown off, leaving Storm, Wolverine and Nightcrawler behind.

While they plan to follow, Wolverine sits down with Zabu, Ka-Zar's sabertooth, and explains that it can't come with them but must go for help. The others are impressed that Wolverine can communicate with the beast.

The trio climb down the snowy cliff and encounter a sentry on one of the gates to the city. Wolverine decides to deal with the man himself and apparently kills him. Storm sees this and thinks, "He's like the great cats on the veldt. When he strikes, there is no mercy in him."

They enter the bowels of the city, finding pipes, garbage and even many small dinosaurs living in the hot confines. One attacks Wolverine by grabbing his hand in its mouth, but he deals with the creature by extending his claws inside its head. Storm then causes a flood which washes the rest of the pesky beasts away. Following the tunnels, they climb to higher and higher levels until they find the central arena where the prisoners are bound before the Petrified Man. Colossus is bound to a post and is being burned at the stake, but so far his steel hard skin is holding out. Just then Nightcrawler teleports in and pulls Scott's blindfold off, leaving him free to use his eyebeams to free Colossus and Banshee. Then Storm swoops in with Wolverine and they free the others.

The Petrified Man flees because he had not expected an attack and his power is drained from creating the city. Cyclops chases him to the top of the dome where the Petrified Man starts renewing his power from the geo-thermal heat-sink which the city is constructed over. The two engage in a battle of the beams, causing bright flashes and noises like thunder. Soon the battle begins to shatter the fragile city that the Petrified Man had created and they both fall into the thermal shaft. Cyclops is rescued by Banshee and Storm pursues the falling villain. But the shaft is dark and deep and soon her claustrophobia sets in. At the crucial moment she pulls back, unable to continue, and the Petrified Man falls into the depths

of the shaft.

The rest of the X-Men flee the city just before it explodes and Storm follows just ahead of the explosion—but she is alone. She lands off by herself, lost in thought over the fact that she couldn't help prevent the Petrified Man from falling to certain doom.

Two weeks later the X-Men are ready to leave the now thawed Savage Land. Karl Lykos chooses to remain behind to try to build a new life for himself in the Savage Land with his friend Ka-Zar. The group boards a raft which enters the tunnel exit of that realm but it emerges into the grip of one of the fiercest storms that region has ever seen.

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Petrified Man is one of the more unusual characters in Marvel Comics. He was last seen in **Astonishing Tales** in the Ka-Zar series drawn by Barry Smith and Byrne's art in this appearance captures the being perfectly. The thing is, though, that he is a villain who's responsible for the deaths of many people. The scene in which Storm feels deep remorse because she couldn't save the creature's life exemplifies a too often simplistic view of life vs. death pervasive in Marvel. "A life is in peril and that's what's important," Storm thinks as she reaches for him. But just because someone is alive doesn't mean that intrinsically that that life is of equal value to that of Cyclops or Prof. X. The fact that she tries very hard to save him is much more than the Petrified Man deserved. That she failed is just one of those things, and in this instance is not worth shedding a tear over.

Speaking of life, this issue also has the now famous scene on page 10 where Wolverine slays a guard. The action is calculated and cold blooded, and while the word "killed" is never mentioned, Ororo's observation that Wolverine strikes without mercy strongly implies that the guard was killed, not to mention Nightcrawler's exclamation of, "Mein Gott." And yet this guard's death is grimly accepted and thought no more of again while the supposed death of The Petrified Man is supposed to be a tragedy.

Wolverine's communication with Zabu is an interesting touch, but his special liason with animals is not something that's really been explored very much since. It's certainly convenient here as it gives Zabu some nice panels.

X-Men #117
"Psi War!"
Script/co-plots:Chris Claremont & John Byrne
Pencils: John Byrne
Inks. Terry Austin
Colors: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

The X-Men are fighting for their lives in the grip of a powerful storm near Antarctica. Storm has been using her powers to try to control the fury of nature unleashed, but even she has her limits. Finally they are spotted by a ship, which picks up the X-Men. But the Japanese crew has a mission which precludes them breaking radio silence. Thus the X-Men are unable to contact anyone to let them know, that they've survived their ordeal.

In Westchester, Jean Grey is leaving in order to come to grips with her belief that Scott and the other X-Men were killed.

Lilandra is trying to help Xavier deal with the tragic loss of most of his team. He thinks back to the events that put him on the road to creating the team. First his relationship with Moira MacTaggert (which mysteriously ended) and then that time in Cairo when he met a young pickpocket (who years later he would know as Storm). It was at the same time that Xavier encountered his first evil mutant.

In a saloon, Xavier meets Amahl Farouk, a corpulent man who has clearly been enjoying the advantages that his power can bring to him. He invites Xavier to join him, recognizing that they are kindred spirits. Charles Xavier believes otherwise and when he vows to bring Farouk to justice, they have a battle on the astral plane.

Such a battle is not new to Farouk and at first he seems to have the upper hand. But as the battle progresses, Xavier comes to understand better exactly what the battle hinges on and with a burst of mental force he spears into Farouk's brain, killing him. Xavier escapes with just a burn on his back.

After relating this tale to Lilandra, she invites him to leave Earth with her since he has nothing to keen him there any more.

At the airport, Jean Grey meets her old roommate, Misty Knight, who is on her way to Japan. As she watches Misty's plane leave, Jean realizes that for the first time since joining the X-Men, she's on her

MVL

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Over the years, while a little more background on the individual X-Men was filled in, Xavier remained a mystery. Other than Cain Marko, not much was known of his background. In "Psi War!" we learn about the Moira MacTaggert connection and what put Xavier on the road to organizing a team to offset the influence of the evil mutants in the world.

Unlike the "flashback" which was nothing more than useless padding in #106, this story not only has a point but is even more interesting than the average issue, even coming off the excellent Savage Land stories. While Farouk is pretty much a cliche (overweight characters with thick jowls are inevitably villains in comics), the battle on the astral plane is a visual wonder, exploring some of the ramifications of Xavier's power in ways rarely glimpsed before or since. A lot of possibilities are suggested by this battle, such as the uncanny powers that are unleashed on the astral plane. We see Xavier first as a silver, humanoid image who quickly garbs himself in sword and armor to battle his foe. Seeing this battle as the combatants see it is fascinating, but it's an idea which isn't followed up on in subsequent issues. This remains a key issue in the continuity of the new X-Men.

X-MEN #118
"The Submergence Of Japan!"
Author: Chris Claremont
Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Ric Vilamonte
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

The X-Men arrive in Japan only to find the port they reach on fire! They go ashore to try to find the cause of the conflagration. They find a discarded newspaper and learn that the island had been largely evacuated before the fire because of an advance warning of a coming earthquake. Wolverine can read Japanese (much to the surprise of his team mates) and he's the one who deciphers what the paper says. Scott states that they should contact Shiro (Sunfire—a former X-Men, albeit briefly) and try to contact Prof. X to let him know that they're all right.

Cut to a massive imperial starship moving out of its orbit high above the Earth. Aboard are Lilandra and Prof. X (who's not taking any long distance calls).

Back in Japan the X-Men find Shiro's compound and slip past the guards with the help of a thick fog summoned up by Storm. But Sunfire confronts the X-Men and is about to take them on when Misty Knight (who is there representing the Premier) insists that he back off so that the X-Men may enter.

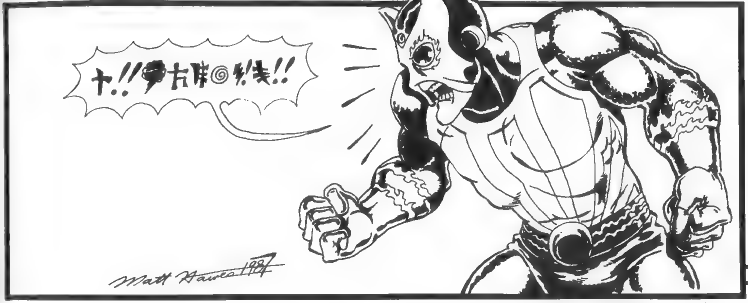
Outside the Shiro Yoshida manor, a truck pulls up, waiting for the preordained time to attack.

While Shiro and the representatives of the Premier argue over whether Shiro alone (or with the X-Men) can battle this threat to Japan, Scott goes looking for a phone. Since Wolverine isn't around to translate, the X-Men don't know exactly what all the arguing is about.

When Scott tries to place his call, the operator informs him that all thephone numbers he has for Prof. X and the school have been disconnected at Xavier's request.

Elsewhere on the grounds, Wolverine encounters Shiro's cousin, Mariko, who is a very attarctive young woman. He is just introducing himself when an earthquake strikes! As he and the other X-Men try to deal with the damage being wrought, they are attacked by Mandroids (men wearing powerful armor constructed specifically to deal with The Avengers back in **Avengers** #95). But the Avengers aren't the X-Men and they have tricks of their own. While the Mandroids are up to taking on Colossus, Nightcrawler is able to beat them by getting himself in a crossfire and then vanishing so that the Mandoids shoot each other. Wolverine's claws can slice right through the armor of the attackers while Cyclops and Banshee together hit on a method for knocking out still another. When Sunfire blasts a Mandoid, the armor holds up to the heat until Storm causes it to rain and suddenly cool the armor, which disintegrates from metal fatigue. When the tractor trailer is driven off by two men, Colossus reaches up from a hole in the ground and yanks off the truck's chasis, thus capturing the last of the attackers.

At that moment a hologram is projected from the Mandroid armor of Moses Magnum, who declares that unless he is declared the ruler of Japan in 24 hours, his earthquakes will sink the nation into the ocean!



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This is a good, solid story with plenty going on, although not all of it matches up. On panel 2 of page 7, a closeup of Storm has her thinking, "Each child's face I see...is like looking into a mirror. I looked like this once, wandering the streets of Cairo after momma and poppa were killed." But at no time are any children shown. The previous panel just shows a member of a rescue team and an old woman while in the background is the silhouette of a crowd. What she's referring to is something that she's seen, but not the reader. It's obviously material added to give depth to the scene but is not the result of the artist drawing anything referred to in the writer's plot.

Even while the X-Men are trying to reach Prof. X, he's off on another planet on which he is with the first woman he has loved in many years.

Sunfire is as argumentative as ever, portrayed much as Thunderbird and Wolverine were in the earliest tales of the new X-Men. But we're not let in on what he's angry about or why he tends to take the contra position no matter who is talking. With the fate of the entire nation of Japan at stake, he feels that he can deal with the threat all by himself and resents the Premier's suggestion that the X-Men could help. There's a fine line between arrogance and stupidity and Sunfire sure crosses it here.

From one brief scene it seems that Misty Knight is in Japan at the behest of Power Man and Iron Fist, for whom she is working. She even contacts Power Man by phone but he's too busy to help out. One wonders what's so big that he can turn down helping to save an entire nation!

The soon to be followed up subplot of Wolverine and Mariko is introduced here, a subplot which would climax in the Chris Claremont/Frank Miller Wolverine mini-series.

Seeing Storm at the height of her powers (and with long, flowing hair instead of the mohawk) captures perfectly the ethereal wonder inherent in this character, a facet which has been lost along the way while readers wait and wait for this character to once more rise to her potential. It's easy to see why Storm was worshipped in Africa as a goddess because she seems so alien to the rest of humanity. The lack of selfconsciousness with which she is portrayed in these early stories (such as her reluctance to wear a bathing suit) is also effective. Nowadays she's pretty much a different character entirely, but I expect that Claremont would state that this is the whole point.

The only weak point in the story is the introduction of Moses Magnum, who looks like just another run-of-the-mill villain in yet another skin-tight costume. I expected something more impressive for a man who has the power to sink an entire island nation.

X-MEN #119
"Twas the Night Before Christmas..."
Author/co-plotter: Chris Claremont
Penciler/co-plotter: John Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: G.Wein
Editor: R. Stern

Storm is flying high over the secret base of Moses Magnum, who has threatened to sink Japan if he isn't made ruler of the island nation. They can see the base built inside a huge island crater and Nightcrawler gets his bearings before teleporting down there. Once inside he starts making his way down into the bowels of the base.

Banshee and Storm begin wrecking havoc with the islands defense system in order to keep Nightcrawler from being noticed as well as the fact that Cyclops, Sunfire and the other X-Men are burrowing to the island from deep beneath the ocean surface. When Nightcrawler plants a homing device, Cyclops and the others know exactly where to have their tunnel emerge upwards. They do so just in time to be attacked by Moses Magnum, who is now a superpowered being, unlike during his previous appearances.

Magnum knocks Colossus clear through a wall of the base, leaving the X-Man angry that he keeps being knocked around so easily by their foes. He vows not to allow it to happen again.

Cyclops orders Sunfire to blast an opening to the outside so that Storm and Banshee can aid them, just as Magnum unleashes Mandroids against Cyclops. But Colossus bursts in and takes on the armored warriors himself.

Magnum is furious and leaves to carry out his vow to sink Japan. Banshee see him slip away. He remembers what he was told about what Magnum must be unleashing to cause earthquakes and decides that his own sonic scream might be enough to stop the energy of Magnum's power. Banshee takes to the sky and tells Scott and the others to get off the island quickly. Banshee then slides a wall of sound across the base of the island, blocking Magnum's energy wave. Magnum increases his power output until finally his entire island shatters, as well as all of the other small islands nearby.

The X-Men and Sunfire are rescued from a tiny piece of island by a rescue plane which has Misty Knight aboard. But Banshee has been injured as he pushed his own power to the breaking point. He is in a coma for a time and finally recovers enough to leave. When he returns to Shira Yashida's house ten days later he finds a surprise Christmas party prepared for him. It helps him feel better spiritually as he thought he'd been overlooked when no one met him at the hospital when he was released.

On the other side of the world, Jean Grey arrives in Scotland and is greeted by Alex Summers (Havoc), Lorna Dane, Moira MacTagger and Jamie Madrox. They plan to stay in Edinburgh for a few days before heading north to Muir Isle.

Meanwhile, on Muir Isle, a man breaks into the Mutant Research Center, bent on sabotage to satisfy a private grudge he has against Moira. Instead he meets something that says, "Humannn...I need...you..." And it uses him, too.

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While Sunfire was angry and argumentative in issue 118, in this part of the story he's exactly the opposite, to the extent that he has no personality at all and just unquestioningly follows Cyclops's orders. Quite a change. Maybe he smartened up?

We see Nightcrawler expanding his teleportation ability so that he can travel over longer distances without straining himself.

This issue marks the turning point in the career of Banshee. It's here where he overextends his sonic scream to such a degree that he loses the power. He was always one of the more interesting X-Men and his departure from the group was unfortunate. Sean Cassidy stays on as a character for a little while longer, but his days as an X-Man actively fighting alongside the other members is all but ended with this story. But what a way to go out—saving an entire nation single handed!

Speaking of saving...After so much was made of the fact that Storm was unable to rescue The Petrified Man in issue 116, in this issue not only is Moses Magnum inside his island when it explodes, but so are at least two Mandroids (that we're shown) as well as anyone else Magnum would have had working for him there. But no mention is made. I think if you're going to take an extreme "all life is sacred no matter who it is or what they've done" position, then it should at least be consistent.

And on the subject of consistency, Misty Knight saw Jean Grey right before she came to Japan—but she never has a conversation with any of the X-Men where she would naturally mention seeing her in the course of conversation. Perhaps this is supposed to be ironic, the story shows that although Banshee is in the hospital for ten days none of the X-Men spoke with Misty Knight in all that time when she would have naturally mentioned running in to a mutual friend?

The Christmas party for Banshee is very touching and is much more interesting than the battle sequences, well done as they are.

The final page touches on the Mutant X plotline first hinted at way back in #104, but now things are really cooking!

X-MEN #120 (April 1979)
"Wanted: Wolverine! Dead Or Alive!"
Author/Co-Plotter: Chris Claremont
Co-Plotter/Penciller: John Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

In Ontario, Canada, the Prime Minister is telling James Hudson, The Vindicator, that he wants Wolverine back. They have too much time and money invested in him to just allow "Weapon X," as they call him, to just walk away. Since they last met, Hudson has organized a team called Alpha Flight. He summons them now for the mission to get Wolverine.

In Japan the X-Men are preparing to board their flight home. Wolverine says goodbye to Lady Mariko by giving her a white chrysanthemum.

On the flight back the pilots run into a storm which moves with them, preventing the plane from landing until it finally pushes them into Canada. Cyclops asks Storm to try to control what is happening to them but she reveals that the inclement weather is being controlled by an outside intelligence. Finally the plane is forced to land in Calgary.

On the runway is Vindicator, who demands that Wolverine surrender. When the pilots try to back up the plane to leave, one of Alpha Flight, Sasquatch by name, picks up the DC-10 and hurls it against an aircraft hanger.

Vindicator flies down to inspect the wreckage for any injured, but the plane is empty. Plus the storm which forced the plane down has increased in fury. The Alpha Flight member known as Shaman informs Vindicator that someone else is turning the weather spell against him.

The X-Men and their friends slip unnoticed through the storm and into the airport. Then they split up and leave. But one by one Alpha Flight tracks the X-Men down, first capturing Nightcrawler and then confronting Storm and Banshee. But Banshee's power is disabled and when he injures himself trying to use it, Storm unleashes the fury of her power against Vindicator, who beats a hasty retreat.

Logan is walking the streets, remarking to himself on how it hasn't changed much, when Sasquatch takes Wolverine by surprise; roughs him up and captures him. Cyclops realizes what must have happened and the X-Men prepare to go on the offensive.

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Alpha Flight is introduced in this issue and what an usual team they are. John Byrne took them in odd directions when he removed them from the X-Men continuity and put them in their own book, but reading this issue and the other Alpha Flight appearances in **X-Men** we can see that Chris Claremont's interpretation of the characters was slightly different from Byrne's. Claremont wrote them as a team while Byrne fractured that image so that the book never really had a focal point.Alpha Flight has more of an air of mystery under Claremont, particularly since two of the characters are supernatural and not really mutants.

The most interesting sequence occurs at the end of the story when Wolverine is walking through the streets of the poorer section East of Calgary and we glimpse a couple of the street people there But this sequence is over quickly when Sasquatch intrudes.

Alpha Flight is an unusual organization in that it is a government sponsored team of heroes. Intended to give Canada a sense of self-worth such as America has because of all of the costumed caperers it has running around. There is a military edge to it since Wolverine resigned—against his government's wishes. So this entire team of heroes is pitted against the X-Men and forced to commit distinctly unheroic acts, such as kidnapping. While Vindicator is portrayed as being compassionate in the face of carrying out his orders, he is nonetheless following those orders without fighting their underlying inhumanity (at least so far as we know). From what we come to learn about Vindicator in John Byrne's **Alpha Flight**, the character of James Hudson as portrayed in this story is very inconsistent. But Claremont and Byrne had different images of these characters.

X-MEN #121 (May '79)
"Shoot-Out at the Stampede!"
Author/Co-Plotter: Claremont
Co-Plotter/Penciler: Byrne
Inker: Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

Cyclops, Colossus and Storm break into the fairgrounds known as the Calgary Stampede. They tracked the captured Nightcrawler and Wolverine to this location. Inside all is still and quiet, closed as it is for the winter. Storm finds Nightcrawler and Wolverine alone tied up in the center of a huge field. They know it must be a trap but Scott and Colossus break in anyway. As they approach their two comrades they find themselves surrounded by Alpha Flight: Northstar. Aurora, Shaman, Snowbird, Sasquatch and Vindicator.

Vindicator informs Cyclops that they can take Nightcrawler and leave in peace but that Wolverine must stay.

Outside, Misty Knight, Colleen Wing and Banshee arrive only to find that an invisible barrier prevents their entry. Shaman has insured that they will not be disturbed.

While Cyclops and Vindicator argue over the legality and morality of kidnapping someone who has resigned from the Canadian government's program, Colossus notices that Northstar seems to be edging towards Cyclops. Whether this is accurate or just a misconception on the part of Colossus is unknown as he suddenly stamps his foot on the ground and shouts to Cyclops to beware.Sasquatch responds by attacking Colossus while Nightcrawler teleports and Wolverine breaks his bonds.

Snowbird chases Storm while the other members of Alpha Flight engage the X-Men on the ground. Shaman attacks with totems which .emerge from his enchanted medicine bag while Northstar (who is as fast as Quicksilver) runs behind Cyclops and socks him a good one to the back of his head.

Snowbird engages Storm by changing into a huge arctic owl, thus revealing her shape-changing ability.

On the ground Wolverine is making short work of Shaman's totems until he summons up a powerful wind. But the wind is stronger than Shaman thinks and soon begins to spread into the city outside the fairgrounds and starts turning into a major storm. Finally the fact of this becomes apparent to Alpha Flight as they realize that Shaman's wind has gotten out of control.

Storm realizes this as well and using her cane to entrap Snowbird she then turns her attention to the powerful winds, reaching out to detect their energy swells until she can dissipate the violent weather safely. When she lands, exhausted from her ordeal, Northstar decides that she should be disabled if she's so powerful and so he attacks her from behind as well. Cyclops furiously strikes back, knocking Northstar to the ground and readies to work him over until Wolverine intervenes He doesn't want to see his friends hurt any more and so agrees to go with Vindicator.

Wolverine is placed in the back of a specially armored car and taken away while the X-Men and friends board a plane for the states which is escorted by Canadian Air Force fighters.

After the plane crosses the border, the X-Men decide that they must return to help Wolverine, whereupon Wolverine reveals that he was aboard the jet all the time, having easily escaped from the armored car. So the X-Men, after their worldwide detours, are finally going home.

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Alpha Flight was largely created and defined by John Byrne and this story reveals what the powers of the characters are. For a group which just emerges as a fait accompli, Alpha Flight is as original and interesting as the X-Men themselves. As written by Claremont, there is a tangible air of mystery about the characters, just as there is about the X-Men. They seem to be created to work behind-the-scenes, operatives for the government, rather than up-front characters like The Avengers.

Some of the groundwork used by Byrne in his series can be seen here as Sasquatch is impetuous and prone to violence, a facet which would be explained in a surprising way two years after the Alpha Flight got under way.

But just because the X-Men are fighting Alpha Flight didn't necessarily mean that they were villains. They were following orders and believed that what they were doing was right. A few issues later a Canadian reader would take offense at this portrayal of Canadian characters, and it would be pointed out that the creator of the team, John Byrne, is from Canada himself.

One has to ask, though, how Wolverine escaped. You'd think that his escape would have been discovered quickly and the X-Men's plane would have been searched. Also, it's a long time before the X-Men encounter Alpha Flight again, in spite of all of the trouble they went through to capture Wolverine. This was the second time Vindicator had tried and failed.

Another point worth noting is that Nightcrawler and Wolverine were tied up together and were just feigning unconsciousness. So why didn't Nightcrawler just teleport the two of them to safety rather than waiting for the X-Men to walk into the trap? They had to have had the opportunity to get away. Certainly Wolverine wouldn't have been afraid to take them on. Sasquatch only captured Logan by blindsiding him. Obviously Wolverine would want revenge for that sneak attack.

Prior to the appearance of this issue, a published interview with Claremont had revealed a different ending for this story. He stated that the two teams would be fighting until the X-Men crossed the border into the U.S., and Alpha Flight, being an arm of the Canadian government, would be unable to cross. This may have been altered because the U.S. and Canada have open borders, unlike the U.S. and Mexico where strict visitation policies are enforced. A visa is not required to travel between the U.S. and Canada, while one needs legal proof of citizenship to visit Mexico, particularly if you want to leave again!

X-MEN #122 (June '79) "Cry For The Children!"
Writer/co-plotter: Claremont
Co-plotter/breakdowns: Byrne
Finished Art: Terry Austin
Colorist: G. Wein
Editor: R. Stern

Colossus is working out in the Danger Room while Cyclops works the controls and Wolverine looks on. But the steel press Colossus is standing in seems to be taxing him even though Cyclops knows he's not at the limits of his strength. It's as though he's given up without trying. Wolverine thinks he knows what's wrong and so when Scott is distracted he sabotages the controls so that the press can't be shut down. Entering the Danger Room, Wolverine walks up to the press and stands in front of Colossus, who now must stop the press on his own to prevent both of them from being crushed. Wolverine states that he figures that Colossus is homesick since he left his family in Russia to join the X-Men. Finally Colossus pushes with all his might and jams the press so that he and Wolverine can walk free. Cyclops understand what Wolverine did and why, but the press is still broken and he orders Logan to get it fixed.

Nightcrawler and Banshee are down in the hanger working on the Blackbird. Everything had been shut down and put away so that when they arrived it looked as though Xavier had left without any intention of returning.

Meanwhile, Xavier is on a world called Imperial Center where Lilandra is being crowned monarch to replace her mad brother who's plans were defeated in **X-Men** #108. Xaviar is uncomfortable around all the fanfare and even Lilandra admits that she preferred it when the two of them were together back on Earth. But she has her duties now.

In Scotland back on Earth, Jean Grey is shopping in preparation for going to Moira MacTaggert's island. There on the street she encounters one Jason Wyngarde, who introduces himself after clumsily bumping into her. When she leaves he watches her depart on the small boat. Jean notices this, but finds him strangely attractive. What she doesn't notice is that his silhouette is not of the man we see.

Back in New York, Scott and Colleen Wing are leaving the phone company where they've gotten the telephones turned back on at the school. They then go out to dinner.

Meanwhile Logan has just glimpsed Mariko Yashida entering an exclusive apartment building, but the doorman isn't allowing any visitors. Logan plans to come back.

Storm has taken a ride down to Harlem where she wants to look up the place where her parents lived years before. While black, her long white hair attracts a lot of attention from passersby. She enters a rundown building which was something much nicer back in the Fifties. When she enters the apartment her parents once had she finds that it's a shooting gallery for junkies. One attacks her and she defends herself. The others then assume that she's a policewoman and they rush her, causing her to summon up her powers to defend herself. When one of the junkies tries to sneak up on her

from behind, he's disabled by Power Man, who tracked Storm there from the street talk he'd heard and from the lighting coming out of the window.

Scott sees Colleen off at the train station and she leaves him with an envelope containing a key and an invitation to her apartment in New York.

Meanwhile, a plane is leaving England headed for the states. Aboard it are Black Tom Cassidy, Juggernaut and a new thorn-to-be in the sides of the X-Men—a gentleman named Arcade!

■■■■

Once more logic is pushed to the extreme and beyond when Scott goes out with Colleen. She and Misty Knight are friends and yet Colleen doesn't seem to know that Jean Grey is still around, as though the subject has never come up. Misty Knight has to have seen Colleen and Scott together and yet no mention of Jean is made by anyone. People with mutual friends inevitably talk about them, and yet no communication occurs. I remember when this issue was first published I thought that I must have missed a story where Colleen or Misty told Scott that Jean was alive or asked why did he thought she wasn't? There's too much done with mutual friends who never talk about each other to be realistic.

The shadow of Jason Wyngarde on page 11 revealing him to be Mastermind is not something I caught the first time around. Considering the complexity of the story this leads into, knowing that he's Mastermind would make subsequent events much easier to follow as that is easily the most complicated plotline Claremont ever had going on in the X-Men, although one of the most fascinating as well.

This story has a subplot which attempts to tackle an issue often ignored in comics: if superheroes are there to help mankind, why do they only tackle super villains instead of everyday realities like drug abuse and poverty? The answer, of course, is that it would be a neverending fight, as evidenced by the stories in the Cloak & Dagger series. Or as Power Man puts it on page 26, "We can save humanity from Doc Doom or Galactus—but not from itself." The portrayal of the junkies is razor-edged and unvarnished. These are people who don't want or expect any sympathy and will kill anyone who intrudes on their existence, as subhuman as it may be.

It should not go without mention that all through this sequence in Harlem, the graffiti is filled with in-jokes, from things like "Len + Glynis" to "Kinky Klaus Janson" and many other recognizeable references to people who were working at Marvel in '79.

Once again, reading this fascinating interlude with Storm makes us miss this version of the character all the more.

X-MEN 123 (July '79)
"Listen -Stop Me If You've Heard It -But This One will KILL You!"
Author/Co-Plotter: Claremont
Co/Plotter/breakdowns: Byrne
Finishes/inking. Austin
Colorist: G> Wein
Editor, Roger Stern

While Spider-Man is swinging through the city he sees Colleen Wing and Scott Summers and drops down to say hello. After a brief chat, he swings off. Moments later a garbage truck driving down the street looks like it's about to hit Scott and Colleen but instead it suddenly stops and a huge flexible tube extends which traps the pair and then captures them.

Spider-Man hears the noise from a distance and recognizes that it sounds like the truck which captured him when he fought Arcade some time before. He races back to the scene but finds it deserted, except for Colleen's scarf.

At the Lincoln Center, Nightcrawler and Colossus are out on dates. When they' arrive at the Metropolitan Opera House they are told that the private box belonging to Prof X is being renovated and are directed to an alternate area. But after entering the door they find themselves trapped in a small room and overcome by gas.

Wolverine returns Mariko to the Jananese consulate and as he's walking away he doesn't notice a garbage truck coming up the street behind him.

At the School For Gifted Youngsters, the phone rings and when Banshee goes to answer it he's struck down by a stun gun. The Phone keeps ringing and as Storm flies down and picks it up, she's struck down as well. On the other end of the line is Spider-Man, trying to warn them about Arcade. Arcade picks up the phone and gleefully informs the wallcrawler that he's too late. Furious, Spider-Man responds by shattering the phone booth he's in.

Sometime later, Cyclops awakens and finds himself tra[pped inside a huge trans[parent sphere and the rest of the X-Men are trapped in identical individual globes nearby. Arcade launches the globes into a giant replica of a pinball game which shocks each globe as it strikes one of the huge bumpers. The se[parate globes are then each launched into holes which lead to separate deathtraps.

Cyclops is in a room with three exits and an hydraulic ram which will smash into the opposite wall as soon as one of the three doors is opened, so Scott only has the chance to choose one door. Arcade promises that only one will lead to freedom. Actually none of them do, but Cyclops can't know that.

Colossus is in some sort of an interrogation room when someone enters who claims to be from the KGB. The man accuses Colossus of being a traitor because he left Russie to work for a team based in the United States.

Wolverine is in a house of mirrors, but as he walks past a row of mirrors which distort his reflection, those distorted versions of himself emerge from the walls and attack him.

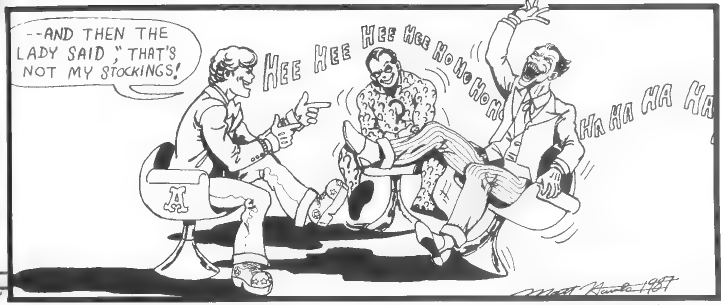
Arcade loves it.

Nightcrawler is in a room in which bumper cars equipped with swirling saw blades come whirling after him, even when he stands on the ceiling.

Banshee finds himself in a room where he's attacked by World War Two aircraft, and since his vocal chords haven't yet healed, he has no powers to use in his defense—except running!

Storm finds herself in an enclosed area which tries to cancel out her ability to travel on the winds. When she tries creating lightning to blast her way out, the room blasts the lightning back at her.

Meanwhile Scott tries an alternative way to escape, which seems to consist of blasting away at the side wall instead of at any of the exits. It works and he finds himself in the chamber containing



Wolverine and his blast has destroyed one of the misshapen Wolverine androids.

As they're about to leave, a metal fist knocks Wolverine to the floor and they see that it is Colossus who has somehow been brainwashed into believing that he's someone named The Proletarian—workers' hero of the Soviet Union.

Arcade thinks this is hysterical. He has Amanda, Colleen and Betsy, the three non-X-Men he kidnapped along with the others, trapped in boxes covered with pink ribbons. He tells them that before the brainwashing wears off, either Colossus will kill the X-Men or the X-Men will he forced to slay Colossus in self-defense.

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Last issue we saw Arcade, Black Tom Cassidy and Juggernaut winging to New York and there was some talk of how no matter what happens, they'll be millionaires. Since Arcade is a paid assassin, it seems as though they have something to do with his being hired, but it's unclear, and this issue doesn't make it any more clear.

Arcade is one of Marvel's more boring villains and unfortunately was not put to rest with a lot of other boring, silly villains when Scourge was cleaning house for Marvel for several months. Arcade is an unfortunate product of the late Seventies when pinball games and video games were big biz. Fads are inevitably expressed in comics in one form or another and Arcade is one of those instances. The most bothersome feature of Arcade is that he is just a bush league version of The Joker without whiteface. Characters like him abounded in DC comics in the Fifties and with any luck most of them were swallowed up by the Crisis On Infinite Earths. Old Batman comics are filled with such characters as The Joker and The Riddler Superman had Toyman and the Flash had The Trickster. They looked little different than clowns in their outlandishly loud clothes and they always had some tie-in to games or puzzles or some sort of toy. Marvel was good about avoiding that sort of silliness in the Sixties and Arcade is a DC-style villain if there ever was one. He's certainly not up to the X-Men's standards any more than is the silliness with Dazzler several issues later. Just because Arcade is mean and murderous doesn't mean he's not silly. The X-Men are much too easily captured; I can't imagine that garbage truck routine working so easily on a team that trains in the Danger Room to react to the unexpected. The appearance of Spider-Man in the story is the only thing that makes it interesting as we see him attempting to warn the X-Men, but much to his frustration it's all too late.

Even the art in this issue seems lacking, and although the imprecise credits disguise it, it looks like it is John Byrne breakdowns finished by Terry Austin. This can be discerned by comparing the Byrne full pager of Arcade at the end of #122 with the version of Arcade seen in #123.

X-MEN #124 (Aug. '79)
"He Only Laughs When I Hurt!"
Author/Co-Plotter: Claremont
Co-Plotter/Penciler: Byrne
Inker: Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

Arcade is watching Colossus taking on Cyclops and Wolverine and is enjoying every minute of it. When the captured Colleen Wing calls him insane, he struts over and kisses her. When she asks what kind of a sewer he crawled out of, he says, "Beverly Hills." He was a spoiled rich kid and when his father threw him out, he killed his father. Realizing he had a unique talent for murder he became a paid assassin and then built Murderworld so that he could murder with style in his Disneyland of death. When the European Maggia hired him to kill Captain Britain, he wound up capturing Spider-Man as well, and both defeated him. Then the Juggernaut and Black Tom Cassidy hired him to dispose of the X-Men, which he hopes he's in the process of doing now.

Colossus is definitely trying to kill Cyclops and Wolverine and they don't seem able to reason with him. Colossus knocks Wolverine through a revolving door and when Scott tries to follow to see what's happened to him, Colossus prevents it and knocks Cyclops aside, where he falls through another secret door.

Storm is meanwhile trying to get out of her chamber where the water level has almost risen to the ceiling.

Cyclops finds himself hurled into the same chamber as Nightcrawler and the bumper cars with the whirling saws are all attacking at once.

Wolverine has found himself in Banshee's death trap and he figures out that the attacking aircraft are holograms. Logan rips out a section of "sky" and finds that it is just a wall with projected images. When they prepare to enter the newly revealed tunnel they find themselves confronted by the Hulk and Magneto. Arcade has anticipated that ploy since it had already been successfully used by Spider-Man.

Storm swims to the bottom of her chamber and finds where the water is entering. Using her lightning power to generate heat, she hopes to melt the welds on the pipe.

Cyclops and Nightcrawler are trapped by the deadly bumper cars so Scott uses his skills to zap every car around them with one powerful richochet zap of his optic beams. Cyclops and Nightcrawler then escape into one of the access tunnels revealed by a gap in the wall caused by Scott's optic attack.

Banshee and Wolverine have their hands full battling the robot Magneto and Hulk.

Nightcrawler comes upon a vent into the control room and teleports in, startling Arcade. When his assistant, Miss Locke, attempts to shoot the X-Men, Nightcrawler knocks her down. With her captured gun he shoots up the control panel until gas vents are used to subdue him.

Cyclops is now fighting the Magneto robot with Banshee and Wolverine but that's interrupted when the room floods and Storm is washed in with the deluge. Just as she begins to recover, Colossus enters and begins attacking them. As he captures Cyclops and Storm, they plead with him to realize what he is doing, that Xavier never forced him to join them, but that they've all found something important in the X-Men. Finally Colossus snaps out of it only to find that Arcade has unleashed another trap as the floor rolls up and encases them, sending the sphere through a network of pipes until it emerges in an abandoned Bronx amusement center. When the sphere bursts open, the X-Men find themselves free.

Parachutes carrying Nightcrawler and the three kidnapped women then come to Earth nearby. Attached to one of them is a note granting round one to the X-Men—'til next time.

Wolverine wants to go back and find Arcade to finish the fight, but Scott convinces him that for now they should quit while they're ahead.

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Unfortunately this is just a long fight issue with the characters fleeing from one deathtrap into the jaws of another. Spider-Man, who knew of their plight and tried to warn them, is nowhere to be seen. Did he give up? Surely he would have hunted for them since he knew for a fact that Arcade had captured them with the intent to kill. Spider-Man has helped out enough other heroes over the years that he could have called in a few favors to ransack the city to find them. But so far as we know he never tried anything beyond just looking on his own. What was the point of his being around at the beginning of #123 if he served no purpose? He certainly wasn't able to warn anyone. He turned out to be a useless appendage to the story.

The brainwashing subplot with Colossus is bizarre but believable.

But then this whole Arcade story is pretty silly.

Although Storm suffers from claustrophobia, and it strikes her in issue 123, it doesn't strike her in this issue when she finds the water in the chamber almost filled to the ceiling or even when she swims to the bottom to attack the pipe which is bringing the water in. Talk about being closed in on all sides!

Deathtrap stories are usually exciting, but the fact that Arcade is behind it just bled all of the drama out for me. I don't believe in Arcade. As weird as the X-Men themselves are, Arcade comes across as a cartoon.

X-MEN #125 (Sept. '79)
"There's Something Awful On Muir Island!"
Author: Claremont
Penciler: Byrne
Inker. Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor. Roger Stern

On Muir Island off the coast of Scotland, Moira MacTaggert is trying to measure Jean Grey's powers which she acquired when she became Phoenix. What she finds is that Jean seems to have finally tapped in to what Moira and Prof. X always believed was a huge potential she possessed. But she's not sure where her speculations are leading. As Jean and Moira complete these experiments and leave the room, they don't notice a figure hiding in the shadows—a thing that had once been a man.

Across the Atlantic at the school for gifted youngsters, the X-Men are working out in the danger room and Scott is not at all pleased with their performance. He feels that they either overreact or don't take things seriously enough. Wolverine is annoyed by Scott's complaints because the Danger Room is just a game to him. Logan stalks out to drown his anger in a cold brew.

A thousand miles above the earth, aboard Asteroid M, Magneto is recovering from his wounds. He is well hidden here as extensive electronic devices prevent the orbiting base from being detected. While scanning some memory tapes he accidentally activates one which shows his wife, a woman who ran away from him years before. But Magneto is just biding his time here until he can strike back at his enemies and the entire world.

In the town of Stornoway near the coast of Scotland, the mysterious Jason Wyngarde plots against Jean Grey, recalling how he had recently appeared to her in many guises and now believes he has her trust, trust that he will turn to love and ultimately allow him to transform Jean Grey from Phoenix into the Black Queen of the Hellfire Club.

Back on Muir Island, Moira wishes Xavier were there because she's afraid of what might happen should Jean ever tap into her full power.

On the planet known as Imperial Center, Xavier finds himself with a lot of time on his hands due to the duties of the realm which occupy much of Lilandra's time. He finally gets around to viewing a tape of what happened when the X-Men defeated the plot of Lilandra's brother which would have unleashed a neutron galaxy and perhaps the destruction of the universe itself. Since Xavier wasn't there he never fully appreciated just what it was that Jean had accomplished. Upon reviewing the tape he realizes just how much power she possesses, and what the result could be if she lost control of it. He decides immediately that he must return to Earth.

On Muir Island, Moira discovers a gold tooth outside the cell of Mutant X. Even though the cell still registers its presence, she checks inside anyway and is shocked by what she finds.

As Jean is entering another part of the lab she detects Moira's mental distress and goes flying to her aid, but as she turns a corner she suddenly finds herself in a different reality and herself garbed in 18th century clothing. Off balance, she is then attacked by a showy being who shocks her into screaming when she looks into its face. Others hear her scream and rush to her aid.

Back in Westchester, The Beast investigates why there seems to be activity at the school which he believed to be closed. He is attacked as an intruder by Nightcrawler who is startled to see that it is The Beast, whom he'd believed to be dead! He contacts the other X-Men and all exchange information and learn that Jean is alive too and in Scotland.

Cyclops calls Muir Island only to be told by Lorna Dane that something is wrong there and they don't know what it is yet, Just then Scott hears Lorna scream and the line goes dead.

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This is an interesting superhero tale with overtones of horror. We see Mutant X lurking in the shadows with just suggestions of what he looks like. Seeing his face in shadow with just glowing eyes communicates a powerful feeling of menace and more than just a touch of horror.

While the main plot deals with the menace of Mutant X (a thread begun way back in #104), the menace of Jason Wyngarde also grows as he begins his subtle, behind-the-scenes influence. We even know exactly what he plans to do—alter Jean Grey's personality until she becomes the evil Black Queen of the mysterious Hellfire Club. The fact that Wyngarde is able to appear to Jean in many guises is a big clue to his true identity for longtime X-Men fans.

In the midst of all this, one page is devoted to the man who caused the X-Men so much grief recently—Magneto. He is shown recuperating aboard Asteroid M, his orbiting base which formed the basis of the story in the recent X-Men vs. The Avengers mini-series.

The Dark Phoenix storyline is also set in motion as we see both Prof. X and Moira MacTaggert independently arrive at the realization that Jean Grey may well possess more power than she could ever control. Although Prof. X is a galaxy away, he chooses to return to Earth to deal with this potential problem. The appearance of Jason Wyngarde/Mastermind is also a crucial element in the Phoenix saga since there are many elements which converge to create the tragedy of Dark Phoenix.

The hallucinations that Jean Grey experiences are quite unnerving as she will take a step and suddenly find herself in another place and time—where she has never been before. While the next issue makes it obvious that Wyngarde is behind this, the proximity of Proteus to the first such attack leads us to believe that this may be part of his power. His reality warping ability portrayed in #126 just adds to this suspicion.

Finally the X-Men learn that no one died at Magneto's Antarctic base and everyone is reunited. Actually they learned the truth from the Beast, but Jean Grey and the others don't find out until next issue. It's about time.

The ending with a scream heard on a phone and then the line going dead is classic, but it sure works well!

Claremont and Byrne are working more as the traditional artist and writer team in these Mutant X stories since this was a plot worked out by Claremont before Byrne came on-board. Although the differences between these and the collaborations between Byrne and Claremont, when Byrne is contributing story elements, is not that dramatic, there are some subtle differences in the way the characters are handled. The team seems more unified when written by Claremont. This is especially evident in the later non-Byrne issues as compared with the fractured way that Byrne chose to handle Alpha Flight in its own book. The two definitely have individual approaches t

X-MEN #126 (Oct. '79)
"How Sharper Than A Serpent's Tooth...!"
Author: Claremont
Penciler: Byrne
Inker: Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

The X-Men's Blackbird jet aircraft comes screaming low over the ocean as it approaches Muir Island. As it passes over the island, Colossus is dropped out and he crashes to earth in a deserted section of Moira MacTaggert's Mutant Research Center. On the next pass, Storm and Wolverine leap out and she drops Logan off at the seaward entrance to the facility. Ororo then flies off to scout the island from the air.

The jet lands via it's VTOL ability and Nightcrawler teleports into the living room of Moira's house. It has been barely over an hour since Scott's phone call to Lorna Dane at the facility was cut off by a bloodcurdling scream.

In the house, as Cyclops and Banshee enter, they find Nightcrawler with the unconscious Lorna and nearby is a strange withered body. Banshee discerns that Lorna is just slightly in shock and states that he'll remain with her while the others continue the search. Since Banshee's powers have not yet returned, he could not be as helpful in a fight.

Nightcrawler encounters Havoc and Jamie Madrox inside the tunnels of the facility, but Havoc doesn't believe who it is as he's sure that the X-Men are dead. Jean Grey told him so. Just then Colossus comes up behind Havoc and when the man realizes who has grabbed him, he can't believe it.

Elsewhere in the facility, Storm and Cyclops detect someone sneaking towards them, and when Storm overcomes them with a blast of wind, it turns out to be Moira. She is amazed to see Cyclops and is especially happy to learn that Sean Cassidy is alive. Cyclops goes off and finds Jean, but she is slightly delirious and at first sees Scott as Jason Wyngarde and calls out his name before she realizes that it's Cyclops. Needless to say, Scott is surprised to hear Jean call out to someone named Jason.

A little while later, they gather in the living quarters and bring each other up to date. Jamie Madrox explains that he had sent some duplicates of himself out to search and one of them was attacked, and Jamie felt as though his soul was being torn out of him. The sacrifice of the duplicate saved Lorna's life.

Wolverine wants to take off after it but Scott wants to know more about who this Mutant X is. Moira reluctantly admits that it's her son, and that its weaknesses are anything inorganic as well as the fact that as he expends energy he uses up the body he's in and needs to transfer to another.

Meanwhile, Mutant X has slipped off of Muir Island on a boat belonging to the first man whose body he took when he escaped. He's now in the nearby town of Stornoway searching for a new body. When Jason Wyngarde passes, Mutant X moves to take it but is repelled by a powerful psychic shield. He quickly finds a human alternative.

The X-Men go to the town upon hearing police reports of the discovery of strange, mummified bodies. As Phoenix is out searching, she is seen by Jason Wyngarde and once again she has a bizarre hallucination in which she is on a horse in a fox hunt, but the prey turns out to be human. She is repelled by this and comes to her senses to find herself standing over the body of another victim of Mutant X.

Wolverine and Nightcrawler are several miles away and Logan has picked up the peculiar scent of Mutant X. It leads him to a policeman who tries to take over Wolverine's body, but quickly withdraws when it encounters Logan's metal sheathed bones. When Nightcrawler and Wolverine attempt to attack together, Mutant X reveals that it calls itself Proteus, and that it can alter and twist reality. The two X-Men are helpless until Storm flies in and attacks. Proteus uses his reality warping to knock Storm from the sky. On the ground she sees him coming towards her and uses her wind power to try to hold him at bay, but Proteus is drawing closer.

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At the beginning of the story, Colossus leaps from the Blackbird into a "deserted section of Moira MacTaggert's Mutant Research Center." Um, if they're out of contact with the people on the ground, how can they be certain that the section of the institute is deserted? Colossus could have landed on top of someone searching the tunnels or even on top of Mutant X himself! Wouldn't that have been a rapid and bizarre climax to this episode!

When Scott finds Jean, she has the name of another man on her lips. This is not unlike a classic scene in Will Eisner's Spirit strips in which Ellen Dolan helps the injured Denny Colt who is delerious and he calls out the name of another woman. The next panel just shows her alone and the look on her face tells all. In here, Scott is startled but chooses not to question Jean about who this Jason is. This also may explain why there isn't any tender scene after she awakens again.

In an ironic scene, Jason Wyngarde's master plan is almost undone when he crosses the path of Proteus, who can't break through Wyngarde's psychic shield. The irony of this one scene is that had Proteus killed Jason Wyngarde, then the Dark Phoenix tragedy may have been averted, but only in retrospect do we realize this. At the time it just seemed like a plot almost nipped in the bud. We didn't know what the Hellfire Club was or how far-reaching its goals were then.

The rerunion of the X-Men, Marvel Girl, Havoc and Polaris is a bit subdued considering it had been months since each believed the others were dead. There's no glad-handing or tender reunions such as we'd been expecting because the threat of Mutant X is overshadowino everything.

The horror element of the story is once more evidenced on page 6 when a closeup of the corpse of Angus MacWhirter is shown. Angus had a grudge against the X-Men and Moira's institute dating back to issue #104 when Angus tried to refuse to allow the X-Men to use the rental of his hydroskimmer even though it was prepaid. In a rare display of strong arm tactics against civilians, the X-Men went ahead and took it anyway. It was destroyed by Magneto but Moira paid Angus in full for the craft. But that wasn't good enough for him and he harbored a grudge. Upon sneaking into the facility to sabotage it, Angus came face to face with Proteus. It was the last mistake that Angus made.

The use of several different plots at once around the main story was popularized by Stan Lee in the mid-Sixties, but Claremont displays an even more deft use of that structure as he ties events much more closely together rather than having largely unrelated incidents occuring which would be explained in the following issue. Here the forthcoming major plot developments with Jason Wyngarde are woven directly into the Proteus continuity so that it seems as though they're related and only later do we find out differently.

If there's a weakness in this issue, it's that the thrust of the plot is so strong that there isn't time for characters to really sit and talk with each other about anything that doesn't relate directly to the menace at hand. Thus the long awaited reunion seems anticlimactic. But in the middle of a threat as deadly as Proteus, there isn't time for something as gentle and touching as the Christmas party held for Sean Cassidy at the conclusion of issue #119 when he got out of the hospital.

Cyclops remarks to himself of the concern he has regarding the fact that Banshee's power has not returned, and even though Sean wears his costume and travels with the X-Men, the handwriting is on the wall that while he's still their friend, he can no longer support the X-Men in their powerful conflicts. It will not be long before he makes his final decision on that front. Interestingly, Banshee chose to leave just a few months after losing his power and when it was clear that it would not return while Storm is still with the X-Men years after her power was taken from her. Her character is so strong and interesting that even without her command over the elements of the wind and the sky, she is still a powerful personality.

X-MEN #127 (Nov. '79)
"The Quality Of Hatred!"
Writer/Co-Plotter: Claremont
Co-Plotter/Penciler: Byrne
Inker. Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor. Roger Stern

Storm is trapped by Proteus who, despite the powerful windstorm she's generated, is coming closer, preparing to possess her body. Risking all, she tries to fly away from him, but he uses his reality warping power again to drive her to the ground. Nightcrawler and Wolverine are nearby and want desperately to help her but they are trapped by Storm's powerful winds and the power of Proteus

Storm is unconscious on the ground, helpless before Proteus now, but before he can possess her, a bullet strikes the ground in front of him. Metal can kill Proteus and the bullets are coming closer. Because he can't see who's shooting at him, he can't do anything to stop them. The person firing is Moira MacTaggert, the mother of Mutant X. She has a special scope which can home in on his primal energy form and she finally has him targeted when Cyclops wrenches the gun from her hands. He can't believe that she was actually going to kill Proteus because the X-Men want him captured alive. Moira can't believe that Scott is so stupid because Proteus has already killed several times that day and will keep on killing She hits Scott in the stomach with the butt of her gun and trips him up so that he falls, striking his head on a rock and knocking himself out.

Proteus is afraid to possess one of the X-Men when someone could shoot him in the moments it would take to stop and take over a new body.

Moira makes sure that Scott is all right before she drives off as well. Moira believes she knows where Proteus must be going.

As Storm's gale blows out, the rest of the X-Men converge on the area and they compare notes. Scott is worried whether there are any psychological aftereffects of the clash v.ith Proteus, especially when he sees Wolverine looking particularly sullen and shaken. He deliberately goads Wolverine into a fight and then involves Nightcrawler and Storm before calling it quits and admitting that it was comparable to a session in the Danger Room.

Fifty miles away, Proteus encounters a young woman who's car has broken down. He quickly takes advantage of the situation and takes over the woman's body. But before he can go on he has to change the flat tire on her car.

In Edinburgh, Moira arrives at the home of her estranged husband, who is now a member of Parliament. She left him twenty years before but he's refused to grant her a divorce because he finds it politically expedient to be married to a Nobel Prize winner. She informs him that not only does he have a son he never knew about, but that their son may well be on his way to kill his father.

Proteus sees his mother outside and knows that once again his father has somehow hurt his mother. Mutant X goes around to the back of the building until he sees his father through a window--and possesses him.

Phoenix has been mentally scanning for Proteus and detects when he kills again. She is able to use her powers to carry the flightless X-Men with her as they all quickly go to Edenburgh.

In Edenburgh, Proteus exits to the street where he confronts his mother. But now in his father's form he finds that he has all his father's powerful memories, passions and vitality, and he wants Moira.

The X-Men arrive and while they delay Proteus, his reality warping power still protects him well. But Phoenix may be more powerful still, so Proteus grabs Moira and threatens to kill her unless the others back off.

Cyclops weighs the situation, listening to Moira's pleas not to let her life stand in the way of stopping Proteus. Finally Scott decides that she may be right, that Proteus must be stoped no matter what, or who, it costs.

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This issue plays the human life is all-valuable game again. Even though Proteus has killed several times in one day, Scott stops Moira when she has the chance to end his slaughter once and for all. What is never addressed after this is that all of the subsequent murders committed by Proteus (two in this issue) are on Scott's head. By making the conscious decision to save Proteus, he cost the lives of two more people. In fact, if it wasn't for the intervention of Moira just then, Proteus would have killed Storm. For someone who believes that life in and of itself is so sacred, Scott is pretty quick to thoughtlessly put the lives of others in jeonardy. Clearly Moira understands Mutant X much better than he does, plus he's seen the withered corpses of the victims of Proteus, but he just blindly blunders ahead.

The young woman on the road is an odd little bit. Her car has a flat tire and she's lamenting that it's more than a mile to the nearest service station. She's portrayed as a cliche as a mile or so can be walked in less than 15 minutes. Plus, she doesn't even know how to change a flat tire. I'm not reading anything into this as after Proteus kills her, he just changes the tire and drives off.

While Moira MacTaggert has been involved with the new X-Men since issue #96, up until now we hadn't learned much about her beyond the fact that Xavier was invo1ved with her years before and that she now runs a secret institute for mutant research. Piece by piece, we learned that at the institute she has some of the most dangerous mutants in the world, including Unus and, until #104, Manneto. But who would have thought that Mutant X would be the most dangerous of all, and that he'd turn out to be her son? Her estranged husband is no prize-winner either as he walked out on her 20 years before but felt it would be inconvenient to grant her a divorce. But with Banshee in the wings, the proper thing had to be done. Ergo, Mr. MacTaggert makes a permanent exit.

An interesting note about the way Proteus uses up people and leaves the shrivelled body when he changes to another is that this was later used in the movie, Lifeforce Space aliens could steal new bodies as well as infect humans whose energy they fed on.

An undercurrent to these events is that Phoenix keeps displaying greater power as well as recovering quickly when she's laid low by Proteus. Of course we all know what that's leading up to.

What the "Reality warping" power that Proteus employs actually is cannot readily be discerned. The fact that he has to see the person he is attacking would lead one to believe that it is some sort of mental attack. But when we see Cyclops using eyebeams against a wall affected by Proteus it indicates that he really does affect reality and change the shape of things.

At the end of this issue, Scott finally realizes that no sacrifice is too great to make to stop Proteus, but no mention is made of the two people who died who need not have if Scott hadn't prevented Proteus from being killed earlier.

X-MEN #128 (Dec. '79)
"The Action Of The Tiger!"
Author/Co-Plotter: Chris Claremont
Co-Plotter/Penciler: John Byrne
Inker: Terry Austin
Colorist: Glynis Wein
Editor: Roger Stern

Proteus has Edinburgh, Scotland, at his mercy, along with his mother, Moira MacTaggert. Because Proteus has Moira hostage, the X-Men confine their actions to protecting the citizenry from the assault of the reality warping power of Mutant X.

Because Proteus now nossesses the body of his father, he also has his father's contempt for Moira and displays it by using his power to turn the woman into various bizarre and inhuman forms.

The X-Men decide that Proteus must be stopped no matter the cost and Storm leads off the attack. She creates a fog around him to try to obscure his sight so that Moira can be rescued, but Proteus had already gotten a fix on Storm and he reforms her cloak into a block of amber around her. Wolverine knows he only has seconds to rescue her before she smothers. He smashes the block around her quickly. She's unconscious but well.

Proteus moves towards Wolverine to kill him but is stopped when Banshee shoots him in the shoulder. Before Sean can shoot again, Proteus opens a pit in the ground beneath Banshee's feet, into which Sean plummets. Proteus seals the pit but leaves it transparent so that the X-Men can see Sean falling. Cyclops responds quickly, blasting upen the pit so that Nightcrawler can climb down and rescue Sean. But as Nightcrawler starts back up the side of the pit, carrying Sean, Proteus strikes. Reality warps so completely that Nightcrawler has no choice but to teleport upwards and appear about fifty feet above the street. He's too weak to teleport back to the surface but they're rescued by Lorna Dane's magnetic powers.

Proteus is using a rock to carry him to Edinburgh Castle, but he's stopped by a psychic attack from Phoenix. She continues hammering away at him until he's able to strike back and stun her. At that moment Wolverine attacks, wounding Proteus. Then Cyclops and Havoc emerge from concealment and catch the rogue mutant in a crossfire of their powers. But Proteus changes his form and flees, chasing Wolverine who had rescued Moira and slipped away to climb up the escarpment to the castle. Proteus succeeds in snatching Moira back.

Colossus is sent ahead to launch an attack in which only he might have the means to succeed. The body of Proteus is decaying but as he moves to take Moira's, Colossus knocks him aside. But instead of being knocked out, Proteus's body disintegrates until only his energy state remains, and he's desperate to quickly have a human host. Colossus is attacked, but he's able to change into his armored form and strike back. Since metal is the one great weakness of Proteus, his molecular structure is totally disrupted and scattered throughout the atmosphere in a huge discharge of energy which lights up the entire sky. The menace of Mutant X is over.

Moira is shaken because both her husband and son are dead now. But Sean Cassidy is there to give her love and support.

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This time it's apparent that Proteus really does shape reality, not just practice hypnosis.

There are some strange bits here like Proteus transforming an inorganic storefront into a swarm of bees, but Storm wants to save the innocent bystanders from being hurt by the bees while at the same time not hurting the bees any more than she needs to! These are ersatz bees! They were brick and wood just seconds ago. If proteus transformed a brick wall into a human being, would that be a real human being or just a fake? Can Proteus truly create life with his powers or just immitate it?

The powers displayed here by Proteus give one the impression that were it not for the frailty of whatever host body he is using, his powers could rival those of Dark Phoenix. He certainly slaps Phoenix down pretty well.

The decaying, shambling, rotting corpse on page 23, as Proteus's host body deteriorates, looks like something out of an E.C. comic, but there's the Comics Code seal right on the cover.

The death of Proteus doesn't seem quite as conclusive as it could be. Other villains whose bodies had been scattered to the four winds sometimes managed to get their act together again at some future date. The Sandman and Absorbin Man come to mind. What could be interesting is if at some future date Proteus returned in the body of some supervillain which was so strong it wouldn't wear out under heavy pounding. That would create some interesting complications.

JOHN BYRNE AND THE X-MEN

John Byrne was a risingg star at Marvel who had yet to really make his mark when he drew **X-Men** #108. This was the climax of a story which Chris Claremont had set the groundwork for months before and which Dave Cockrum had done some dramatic work on in #107.

But even at the bi-monthly pace the title had at that time, Cockrum was unable to keen up.

Along with Byrne came an inker who had already become identified with the penciler's work--Terry Austin. Although Byrne would later complain that Austin would change some of the facial expressions he drew and add little things which Byrne had not wanted in the art (such as Popeye in one panel of one of the last issues they did together), in the late Seventies it was Terry Austin who knew how to bring out the power inherent in Byrne's art. This is certainly evident in "Armageddon Now!"

That first X-Men story was by no means an average issue which would have allowed penciler and inker both to become acquainted with the characters. Instead it was a baptism by fire which demanded that they both deliver work at the top of their craft just to render the complex scheme of images and characters that Claremont had brought into play. This story features not only the X-Men, but the Starjammers and a horde of alien beings, as well as an alien force which threatens to destroy the universe! There are cameos of the Fantastic Four, the Avengers and the President of the United States. We see sleek alien spacecraft and even a gigantic robot guardian.

The X-Men undergo bizarre hallucinations and Phoenix saves the universe in one of the most wordy, complex and satisfying climaxes that Chris Claremont has ever written. Add to this the fact that the reproduction in the newsstand comic book was much better then.and you have incredible demands being made on the artists. That Byrne and Austin rose to those demands demonstrated their incredible range all in one shot.

In #109, more typical demands were made of Byrne as it's a good guys versus bad guys story set in the woods near Xavier's School for Gifted Children. The artwork highlights the X-Men themselves rather than being commanded to render such an array of corruscating special effects that.would give Industrial Light and Magic pause.

Issue #110 is a fill-n issue done by Cockrum When Byrne and Austin returned in issue #111, Byrne would draw every X-Men for the next thirty issues.

With "Mind Games!" in #111, Byrne would establish himself as the definitive artist on the book and set standards that would only occasionally be equalled after he left. It was during those thirty or so issues that the X-Men achieved the prominence which continues to affect the marketplace today. While the series clearly hasn't crashed in the wake of Byrne's departure from the book, his images set the tone for what would be expected from subsequent artists.

Over the last decade, Byrne's art has gone through a gradual transition into the style we see today on Superman. But in '78 Byrne's work was still heavily influenced by Neal Adams, with the visual dynamics of Jack Kirby much in evidence (the latter still being true today).

"Mindgames!" in issue #111 shows Byrne's compositions at the height of their Kirby influenced period and contain some of the best storytelling he has ever done. Just as in the classic Kirby Marvels of the Sixties, power is communicated through the body language of characters and their positions in the panels. The splash page could have been just a boring crowd scene but every face tells a story, particularly those of two clowns standing in the rear, one of whom has a cigarette dangling from his mouth. And in the center of this crowd is the Beast, wearing a rumpled slouch hat and a startled expression. This is only the third issue of X-Men Byrne drew but in it he got to render the X-Men as they might be with different personalities. Banshee is a carnival barker, Storm a sideshow jungle goddess and Phoenix a high trapeze artist named Miz Destiny. The most interesting touch of all is having Scott Summers as just an ordinary carnival worker with the name "SLIM" embroidered on his shirt. (Scott was called Slim Summers in **X-Men** #1, but the name was quickly discarded). Images throughout this story hearken back to Kirby's X-Men circus issue way back in #3. It's only fitting that the story should climax with a full page drawing of Magneto in a classic Kirby stance.

Then in #112, which continues the Magneto saga, we see John Byrne using layouts more influenced by Neal Adams with their complicated figure compositions and intricate backgrounds. Images such as Magneto exploding the wagon they were all standing in on page 13, panel 3, are particularly startling.

In developing his own techniques, Byrne is an interesting synthesis of Kirby and Adams. We can see Kirby on the splash page drawing of Magneto as well as in the two shots of the fistfight between Magneto and Colossus on page 22, panel 4 while other images draw on the fine line technique of Neal Adams to communicate their sometimes more subtle impact. But all the while Byrne is finding his own artistic voice in order to express his ideas in terms of the masters he grew up reading as well as taking those images further to show that he understands how to build on them and rework them in

very effective ways. An issue like #113 with its savage battle with Magneto, certainly hearkens back to the raw power and refined talents displayed in the early Lee & Kirby collaborations without being just a mindless homage such as **Marvel Two-in-One** #50 ("The Thing vs. The Thing") was. Like the earlier Marvels, this issue too can be read and studied by up and coming artists who are trying to get at the heart of what makes an effective superhero comic. This story has power and pathos, which is what Marvel founded itself on.

In #114 Byrne is able to explore the beauty, terror and wonder of the realm aptly named The Savage Land. Banshee is snatched from the sky by the huge claw of a pterasaur while a few pages later Ororo emerges from a hut garbed like a barbarian princess straight out of an Edgar Rice Burroughs novel.

Issues 114-116 include Sauron and the Savage Land, images explored by Neal Adams in issue 60-63, so the comparison is inevitable. They could be bound together in one volume and read almost as though they had been crafted by the same talents. Claremont and Byrne pick up the saga of Carl Lykos and carry it to the next inevitable plot point, where an individual who can change into a pterasaur-man finds himself in the Savage Land and can't help but fit into the surroundings perfectly.

The linework is especially clean in this Savage Land saga, highlighting the characters against more simple backgrounds than were found in Magneto's underground base. Byrne illustrates a world which is alluring in its strangeness, with provocative images that command our attention.

In #117, a change of pace issue to be sure, the spotlight is on Charles Xavier. On page 5, panel 4. Lilandra enters Xavier's study and even before we see him the structure of the panel sets the mood. The angle is low and to one side and across the room we see a three-quarters view of Xavier's chair in front of the fire. The scene suggests isolation, brought on by Prof. X's belief that most of the X-Men died in Antarctica. Not even the warmth of the fire can dispell the sensations of cold depression that permeate the room. It is the perfect setup for the flashback that follows, a story never told before about a fateful meeting in Cairo.

In a composition not used often by Byrne, page 10 features a left-facing three-quarters view of Xavier's face against which is a collage of images of his early adulthood. This moves on to a panorama of Cairo which shows the modern contrasted against the ancient wonders of the pyramids. From this we go to street level where Xavier encounters a young pickpocket who inadvertantly brings him into contact with Xavier's first evil mutant.

A very atmospheric panel sets up this fateful meeting on page

15 as Xavier enters a dimly lit saloon from the brightly lit outdoors. But the real bravura performance in this issue is the battle on the astral plane which occupies four pages, leading up to the very cinematic tryptich in which Xavier and Farouk sit facing each other across the room, Xavier stands as Farouk falls over and then Xavier walks casually out in the third panel as the rest of the people turn to the evil mutant's lifeless form. The latter is the kind of simple, straightforward storytelling which looks easier to do than it is. A right-facing profile of Xavier serves as the other bookend signaling the end of the flashback. Told with few characters, the personal conflict in this story is just as powerful as the cataclysmic battle with Magneto in issue #113.

The panorama featured on pages 2 and 3 of issue #118 captures the fury and horror of coming on a scene of a city engulfed in flames. Seen from a distance, the entire sky is filled with angry red clouds

What adds to this power, though, is the coloration as the illustration was done with the fact in mind that the color would give the impact to what he had drawn. Because of this one notices a coloring error--the sky and clouds are red, but that color is not reflected in the water, which is varying shades of green.

A panel rendered for a comnlete lack of color occurs on page 11 where the final panel shows the flash of shadow images one would see when a night scene is suddenly illuminated by a blast of powerful light. Trying to put color to this panel would have just confused the eye as it would try to translate the image into normal terms rather than seeing it as the light effect it is intended to be.

When Byrne gets to render the effects on his characters of an earthquake taking place right at the moment, he also finds himself reintroducing the Mandroids, images last rendered by Neal Adams. It seems like more than just chance that the panel which introduces the Mandroids in this issue is an odd-shaped design employed by Adams very often when he was drawing the X-Men. It also conveys the effect of the characters having entered a scene where they have crashed through a wall into an area just shaken by a quake.

The illusion of movement on the comics page is achieved quite well by Byrne on page 30 when we see the tractor trailer truck approaching the upstretched arms of Colossus,who is reaching up from a hole in the street. It then cuts to a wide shot of the truck skidding to a crashing halt minus its undercarriage.

The splash page of issue #119 has a great shot of Storm high in the sky over the crater island base of Moses Magnum while she carries Nightcrawler in one hand. Seeing the islands far below glimpsed through the clouds gives a good feeling of looking down

from a great height while Storm soars as only a super-being can.

The rest of issue 119 and most of issue 120 shows John Byrne settling down to good. solid storytelling without any flourishes. The story moves, the panels establish an even flow and rhythm and it's clear that Byrne has achieved a comfortable mode that he will deviate from only oupon the demands of the story.

A nice touch occurs on page 27 of #120 when Byrne portrays a Calgary that he's familiar with when Wolverine goes out walking. Although it only lasts for a couple of panels (since this story is about the X-Men and Alpha Flight, not Calgary), we see Wolverine walk past some scruffy street people and in the second panel he's clearly passing the East Calgary Smoke Shop. In the panel following we see an eerie glimpse of Sasquatch, which heightens the sense of menace about the character, while also squashing the perspective slightly so that Sasquatch looks much shorter than at any other time we see him in the story.

That Byrne is proud of his characters in Alpha Flight is evident when he finally brings them fully on stage in #121 after giving us sneak peeks. Page 7 sia full page rendering practically suitable for a poster as we see all of Alpha Flight striking poses that best show them off.

In issue #122, Byrne deals more with rendering characters to reveal their personalities rather than to show off their superpowers. Even the scene when Coossus has to break the huge steel press in order to save both Wolverine and himself, the scene is meant to deal with his inner turmoil and how it is affecting his performance. This also allows Wolverine to show a side of himself seldom glimpsed–a concern fo the personal feelings of a fellow team member. The only real action in the story is when Storm is attacked in the shooting gallery by junkies and must defend herself. Byrne seemed to really love to draw Storm and displays of her power were always awesome but beautiful, charging each panel with the mystery and wonder of this woman who had lived in Africa as a goddess and who, even in civilization, caused heads to turn because her presence was so beyond the norm. Had Byrne remained on the X-Men, it's doubtful he would have wanted to see this character laid low by getting a mohawk and then losing her powers. She just had too much dignity for that.

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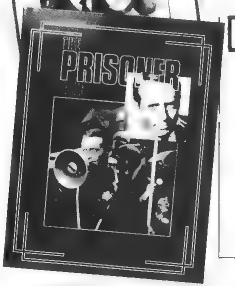

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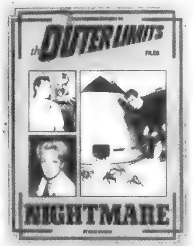

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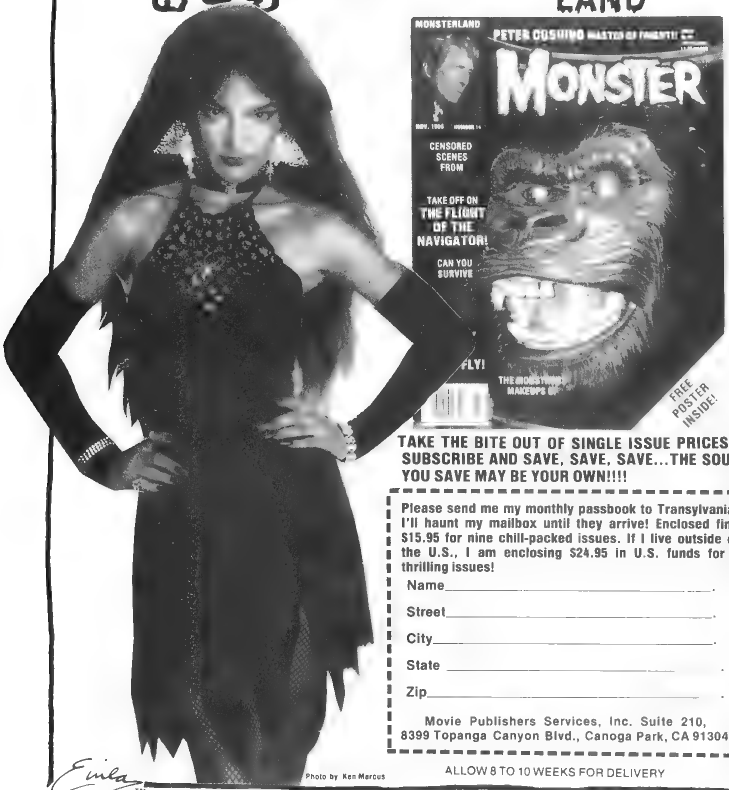

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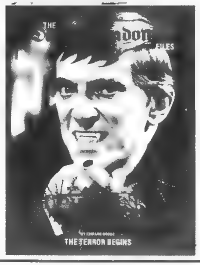

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